Asking a Good Question

Start your interview with a point to the listener. The interviewer should name the person who is doing the interview and who is being interviewed. The interviewer should also name the date of the interview.

Here is some advice about how to ask good questions:

1. Ask about the person’s actions.

“It depends on the person, but usually I ask them about their specific [habits and practices](http://goinswriter.com/leo-babauta-interview/),” says Jeff Goins. “I’m less interested in what they would write in a book and more interested in how they try to apply the ideals they write or speak about.”

Jeff is trying to get under a person’s rhetoric to see the routines they’ve cultivated to be successful. If you can get people to describe their actions rather than their beliefs about themselves, you’ll see a clearer picture of them, one unmarred by slogans.

1. Ask “forward” questions.

“Never ask, ‘What keeps you up at night?’ Ask ‘What’s going to keep you up tonight after this interview?’” says Porter.

“The past, unless your interviewee is relatively unknown, is research-able. Keep in mind that as much as we all may like our laurels, resting on them is never as interesting as diving off them into a new pool. The reminiscence interview is never as cool as it sounds.”

“The ‘What’s the best part of the next thing you’re doing?’ question will engage your subject’s current, forward-looking energy. You get a more excited interviewee, who wants to tell you what she or he is into.”

1. Ask open-ended questions.

Morgan’s goal is to get athletes and coaches talking.

“I try to ask open-ended questions that can’t be answered with a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no,’” he says. “I also ask people to explain to me certain aspects. Such as, ‘describe how this team came together this season.’”

“I also say ‘how’ a lot. For example, ‘How was your first-ever varsity start at quarterback?’”

What a cool idea: to get them talking, just write the word “HOW” in bold letters at the top of your list of questions. Every time you look at it, ask, “How?”

“How do you do that? How do you feel about that? How did it go?”

1. Ask dumb questions.

“Dumb questions are my favorite,” says Marissa Villa. “Today, I asked someone, ‘Um, what does that mean?’ when he used an abbreviation. You can’t be afraid to ask dumb questions.”

If you’re confused, don’t move along to the next question. Ask for clarification, even if you sound stupid. You don’t want to start writing your article and then realize you don’t know what you’re talking about because you were confused during the interview.

“It also strokes people’s egos when you tell them they’re the expert and you want to learn from them,” says Marissa.

1. Ask pointed questions and light-hearted questions.

Try to mix up the tone of your questions. “I try to ask a few pointed questions that contrarians might ask,” says Jeff. It’s always good to poke a little, as long as you [don’t go too far](http://ronrosstoday.com/?p=465). “And throw in the occasional light-hearted question for fun,” he says.

This is a good way to tailor your interview to your audience.

1. Ask short questions and then follow up.

Don’t try to pack all your questions into one super-mega question. “Instead of asking a long-winded question,” says Morgan, “split it up into two parts. Follow-up questions can be key.”